

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 5549

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SUBJ: NARCOTICS INTERDICTION: STATUS REPORT ON COLOMBIAN CUSTOMS
AND DAS

CARACAS FOR DEA

REF A. STATE 112017 B. BOGOTA 5084

1. SUMMARY: FOL IS IN REPLY TO REQUEST CONTAINED REF A FOR EVAL
ROLES OF GOC CUSTOMS AND DEPT OF ADMIN SECURITY (DAS) IN COLOMBIAN
DRUG INTERDICTION EFFORTS. END SUMMARY.

2. DAS: THE DEPT OF ADMIN SECURITY COMBINES SEVERAL NATIONAL
SECURITY AND POLICE ROLES. IT IS RESPONSIBLE ALONG WITH F2
(OF THE NATIONAL POLICE) FOR COUNTER INTEL AND NATIONAL SECURITY
INTEL OPS, IMMIGRATION AND VISA CONTROLS, COUNTERFEITING, MAJOR
CRIMES, CRIMES AGAINST THE STATE AND NARCOTICS, AMONG OTHERS.
THE AGENCY'S EFFECTIVE ENTRY INTO NARCOTICS FIELD CAN BE DATED
FROM AUG 74, WHEN CURRENT DAS CHIEF MAJ GEN JOSE JOAQUIN MATA LLANA
BERMUDEZ ASSUMED COMMAND. SINCE THAT TIME THE SPECIALIZED DAS
NARCOTICS UNIT (KNOWN BY THE ACRONYM UNICONA) HAS GROWN TO SOME
70 AGENTS, 35 OF THEM ASSIGNED TO DAS HQS IN BOGOTA. ONLY THE
35 AGENTS ASSIGNED TO THE BOGOTA OFFICE ARE FULL TIME NARCOTICS
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AGENTS; AGENTS OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL HAVE OTHER DUTIES IN ADDITION

TO NARCOTICS. NARCOTICS AGENTS IN BOGOTA ARE USED AS A MOBILE STRIKE FORCE TO BEEF UP PROVINCIAL DAS OPERATIVES IN NARCOTICS OPS OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL.

A. UNICONA IS CURRENTLY HEADED BY DR ANTONIO LOPEZ, AN ATTORNEY WHO WAS FORMERLY CHIEF OF DAS'S JUDICIAL POLICE DETECTIVE FORCE. HE IS EXPERIENCED IN GEN POLICE WORK AND HAS ATTENDED DEA NARCOTICS TRAINING IN THE STATES. LOPEZ HOWEVER, IS THE FOURTH DAS NARCOTICS SUPERVISOR ASSIGNED SINCE AUG 74. RAPID TURN OVER IN COMMAND, STAFF AND AGENT CADRES IS CHARACTERISTIC OF DAS, WHICH CAN BOAST ONLY A HANDFUL OF OFFICIALS EXPERIENCED IN GEN POLICE WORK. MOREOVER THE AGENCY--WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE DIRECTLY TO THE PRES OF THE REPUBLIC--UNDERGOES A NEAR COMPLETE TURN OVER IN PER EVERY FOUR YEARS WITH CHANGES IN NATIONAL ADMIN.

B. EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING: WITH THE ARRIVAL OF GEN MATAALLANA IN AUG 74, DAS BEGAN A MAJOR EFFORT TO UPGRADE ITS NARCOTICS INTERDICTION CAPABILITY. FIFTY DAS AGENTS ATTENDED A TWO WEEK DEA NARCOTICS TRAINING COURSE IN BOGOTA DURING OCT 74 AND AN ADDITIONAL 40 AGENTS ARE SCHEDULED FOR A SIMILAR COURSE TO BE OFFERED IN AUG 75. IN ADDITION, THE AGENCY HAS ORGANIZED SEVERAL SHORT AGENT SEMINARS DEALING WITH GENERAL JUDICIAL POLICE TECHNIQUES AND PENAL CODE PROCEDURES. DESPITE INCREASED TRAINING AND MANPOWER DEVOTED NARCOTICS WORK, AND THE STRONG PERSONAL INTEREST AND BACKING OF DAS CHIEF MATAALLANA, UNICONA REMAINS UNDER EQUIPED FOR THE SIZE OF ITS STAFF, PARTICULARLY IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT. THOUGH SOME US-FINANCED EQUIPMENT (BINOCULARS AND NARCO TEST KITS) DESTINED FOR THE UNIT IS BEGINNING TO DRIBBLE INTO COUNTRY, MAJOR ITEMS (RADIOS AND VEHICLES) ARE STILL ON ORDER. DAS CHIEF MATAALLANA AVERS THAT HIS BUDGET WILL NOT ALLOW SIGNIFICANTLY LARGER EXPENDITURES FOR NARCOTICS OPS; HE, THEREFORE LOOKS TOWARDS FOR NARCO EQUIPMENT AND OP FUNDING.

C. ACCOMPLISHMENTS: DESPITE RAPID PER TURN OVER, LACK OF FUNDS AND EQUIPMENT, DAS HAS STILL MANAGED TO MAKE SEVERAL MAJOR DRUG CASES THIS YEAR. OF 37 CASES REPORTED BY DEA BOGOTA SINCE JAN 12 INVOLVE DAS. SIGNIFICANT SEIZURES BY UNICONA INCLUDE 15 KILOS CONCAINE AT LETICIA (JAN 75) DESTRUCTION OF A HASHISH LAB AND 71,000 KILOS OF MARIJUANA (MAR 75) AND DESTRUCTION OF 80 HECTARES OF MARIJUANA PLANTS (JUNE 75). DAS AND DEA BOGOTA ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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CURRENTLY WORKING IN TANDEM ON AN INDEPTH INTEL OP AIMED AT COCAINE LABS. (NOTE: DAS INTEL AND DETECTIVE (JUDICIAL POLICE) UNITS ALSO WORK NARCOTICS CASES ON AN AD HOC BASIS. DAS IMMIGRATION OFFICERS ALSO COOPERATE WITH GOC NARCOTICS UNITS AND WITH DEA IN CASES INVOLVING AMCITS OR OTHER FORN NATIONALS)

D. PROBLEM AREAS: DEA BOGOTA CONTINUES TO PASS SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF OP INTEL TO DAS, BUT THE RETURN FLOW OF SIMILAR INFO IS VIR-

TUALLY NEGATIVE, EXCEPT AS REGARDS ARRESTS OF AMCITS. PART OF THE PROBLEM IS GEN MATAALLANA'S "HIP-POCKET" METHOD OF OPERATION. MATAALLANA PREFERS TO HANDLE ALL FACETS OF DAS OPS PERSONALLY, SELDOM CONFIDING IN HIS SUBORDINATES AND LEAVING THEM LITTLE LATITUDE FOR DIRECT DEALINGS WITH OTHER ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES, INCLUDING DEA. A SECOND MAJOR PROBLEM AREA INVOLVES CONSTANT SHIFTS IN DAS PER. THE AGENCY HAS RECENTLY UNDERGONE MAJOR MPER SHIFTS AMONG SPECIALIZED UNITS CHIEFS, INCLUDING THE CHIEF OF THE NARCOTICS UNIT. MORALE AMONG DAS NARCOTICS OPERATIVES, THEREFORE REMAINS POOR.

3. GOC CUSTOMS: AS NOTED IN BOGOTA 5084 CUSTOMS EFFORTS IN THE FIELD OF DRUG INTERDICTION HAVE BEEN SLOW IN GAINING MOMENTUM AS A RESULT OF CONTINUING INTERNAL PER PROBLEMS STEMMING FROM A REORGANIZATION OF THAT AGENCY UNDER ITS NEW DIRECTOR GEN, RETIRED ARMY MAJ RAUL OCAMPO RODAS. SINCE TAKING OVER IN AUG 74, OCAMPO HAS REPLACED MOST SENIOR CUSTOMS OFFICIALS IN A LARGELY SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO REDUCE CORRUPTION IN THIS AGENCY. HE HAS ALSO CREATED IN HIS DIVISION OF INVESTIGATIONS A NINE PERSON SPECIALIZED NARCOTICS INVESTIGATION AND INTERDICTION UNIT HEADED BY AN ATTORNEY ON LOAN FROM THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORGEN. THIS UNIT--WHICH SUPPORTS NARCOTICS INTERDICTION OPS OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL ON A TDY BASIS--WILL BE EXPANDED AS ITS WORKLOAD AND EFFECTIVENESS INCREASE. WORKINGRELATIONS BETWEEN THIS UNIT AND DEA BOGOTA ARE EXCELLENT.

A. TRAINING: GOC CUSTOMS RECENTLY COMPLETED AN AMBITIOUS TRAINING PROGRAM FOR 45 AGENTS INVOLVED AT LEEAST PART TIME IN NARCOTICS WORK. THESE AGENTS--SEVERAL OF THEM WOMEN--UNDERWENT NEARLY TWO MONTHS OF SPECIALIZED TRAINING INCLUDING JUDICIAL POLICE PROCEDURES AND A TWO WEEK COURSE IN NARCOTICS INTERDICTION GIVEN BY US CUSTOMS AGENTS IN BOGOTA. SEVENTEEN MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP UNDERWENT A FURTHER ONE WEEK SESSION DESIGNED TO TRAIN THEM AS INSTRUCTORS
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IN NARCOTICS INTERDICTION TECHNIQUES. THESE LATTER AGENTS WILL BE CALLED UPON TO TRAIN ADDITIONAL GOC CUSTOMS NARCOTICS OFFICERS UNDER A NEWLY-DEvised TRAINING PROGRAM INSTITUTED B DIRE TOR GEN OCAMPO. FINALLY, OCAMPO HIMSELF IS NOW VISITING THE US AT THE INVITATION OF THE DIRECTOR OF US CUSTOMS PRIMARILY TO OBSERVE OUR NARCOTICS INTERDICTION EFFORT.

B. SUCCESSES: DURING 74, CUSTOMS PER HAVE SEIZED APPROX 244,403 KILOS OF MARIJUANA AND OVER 40 KILOS OF COCAINE. DURING 75 CUSTOMS SEIZURES TO DATE TOTAL NEARLY 30,000 POUNDS OF MARIJUANA AND 168 POUNDS OF COCAINE. THE MOST RECENT MARIJUANA SEIZURE (BY CUSTOMS OFFICERS AT BUENAVENTURA) WAS VALUED AT OVER ONE MILLION DOLLARS. THE ABOVE STATISTICS DO NOT INCLUDE SEIZURES MADE BY CUSTOMS OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO MIXED JUDICIAL POLICE NARCOTICS UNITS STATIONED AT CALI AND BOGOTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS.

C. GOC SUPPORT COSTS: WHILE BOTH GOC CUSTOMS AND DAS SUPPORT COSTS FOR NARCOTICS INTERDICTION OPS ARE SUBSUMED IN NORMAL OPERATING BUDGETS AND ARE, THEREFORE NOT EASILY BROKEN OUT, CUSTOMS--UNDER OCAMPO'S LEADERSHIP-- APPEARS TO BE SPENDING SUBSTANTIAL SUMS ON DRUG ENFORCEMENT. IN ADDITION TO PAYING SALARIES AND EXPENSES FOR ITS CENTRAL NARCOTICS UNIT IN BOGOTA, CUSTOMS HAS ALSO CONTRIBUTED PER TO MIXED (DAS, F2, CUSTOMS) JUDICIAL POLICE NARCOTICS UNITS STATIONED PERMANENTLY AT CALI AND BOGOTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS. IT HAS AGREED TO CONTRIBUTE ADDITIONAL PER TO MIXED NARCO UNITS TO BE ESTABLISHED AT NINE ADDITIONAL PORTS OF ENTRY UNDER OVERALL CONTROL OF THE ASST ATTORGEN FOR JUDICIAL POLICE. FINALLY, CUSTOMS HAS OPTED FOR AN EXPANSION OF ITS MARINE CAPABILITY. IT HAS ORDERED FIVE BERTRAM PATROL VESSELS COSTING SOME 38,000 DOLLARS EACH AND IS STUDYING THE POSSIBILITY OF BUYING ONE OR TWO LARGER BERTRAM VESSELS FOR EXTENDED PATROL ACTIVITIES AIMED PRINCIPALLY AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS WORKING THE NORTHCOAST

AND GUAJIRA PENINSULA AREAS.

D. PROBLEM AREAS: AS THE DEPT IS AWARE, CUSTOMS IS ONLY ONE OF FOUR GOC AGENCIES WITH OVERLAPPING NARCOTICS INTERDICTION AUTHORITY. OVERLAPPING AREAS OF JURISDICTION AND LACK OF COORDINATION AMONG GOC AGENCIES HAS ALREADY RESULTED IN SEVERAL INCIDENTS, ONE OF WHICH INVOLVED RESIDENT DEA AGENTS. NONETHELESS GOC CUSTOMS BY LAW, POSSESSES SIGNIFICANT NARCOTICS INTERDICTION RESPONSIBILITY
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AND AUTHORITY, WHICH THE CURRENT DIRECTOR IS DETERMINED TO CARRY OUT. THIS AUTHORITY IS MAINLY BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY, CONCERNED WITH NARCOTICS AS CONTRABAND; VIZ, THE ILLEGAL IMPORT OR EXPORT OF PROHIBITED DRUGS. THEREFORE GOC CUSTOMS AGENTS MAY ACT AS JUDICIAL POLICE IN CARRYING OUT NARCOTICS INVESTIGATION AND ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS. IN THIS, CUSTOMS OFTEN ACTS IN COOPERATION WITH THE OFFICE OF THE ASST ATTORGEN FOR JUDICIAL POLICE, DAS A/O F2 OF THE NATIONAL POLICE.

E. CUSTOMS ACTION PLAN: FULLER DETAILS ON CUSTOMS' PLANS FOR EXPANDED NARCOTICS INTERDICTION EFFORTS USING US-FINANCED EQUIPMENT NOW ON ORDER OR REQUESTED FOLLOW BY SEPT. WHITE

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